

Lavrov Defends Anti-Gay Bill

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The  Moscow Times

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Tuesday rejected criticism from the Dutch government and the European Union about proposed legislation that would outlaw "homosexual propaganda."

Responding to Dutch assertions that the legislation may be contrary to Russia's international obligations, Lavrov said there were no such obligations.

"We don't have a single international or common European commitment to allow propaganda of homosexuality," he said.

The State Duma voted on Jan. 25 to support a bill that makes public events and dissemination of information about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to minors punishable by fines of up to \$16,000. The bill still requires the parliament's and the president's final approval.

Lavrov spoke at a news conference with Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans, who

on Feb. 1 urged Russia not to put the bill into law and said he would raise the issue with Lavrov.

"Discrimination against homosexuals is unacceptable. Gay rights are human rights, and Russia must adhere to its international obligations," Timmermans said, calling on the Russian parliament not to approve the bill.

At the news conference, Timmermans said he and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton believe the legislation "could infringe on fundamental rights."

Russia decriminalized homosexuality in 1993, but homophobia remains strong in the country. Authorities routinely ban gay rallies and parades.

Those behind the bill say minors need to be protected from "homosexual propaganda" because they are unable to evaluate the information critically.

Lavrov insisted Tuesday that since homosexuality had been decriminalized, gays have enjoyed full rights in Russia and "can go about their business absolutely freely and unpunished."

But Russia "has its own moral, religious and historical values," Lavrov said, warning against "another kind of discrimination when one group of citizens gets the right to aggressively promote their own values that run against those shared by the majority of the society and impose them on children."

The bill has drawn opposition from many Russians. Activists have rallied outside the State Duma protesting the bill, while several leading magazines dedicated their latest issues to the problems that homosexuals face in the country.

Afisha, a biweekly culture magazine, ran the rainbow flag on its cover along with a dozen profiles of Russians, from trendy journalists to utilities workers, speaking openly about their homosexuality.

The bill is backed by the ruling United Russia party and is likely to pass. The parliament is going to discuss amendments to the bill until late May.

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